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An Analysis of Trends in Food Import Refusals in the United States

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Millions of pounds of fresh fruits, vegetables, cut flowers, herbs, and other agricultural and food products enter the United States via commercial shipments from other countries every year. Although these items appear harmless, there could be hidden threats in that baggage and in those truckloads, trainloads, and containers of fresh and processed food items that could seriously threaten U.S. agriculture, its natural resources, and its economy (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2007).

Food imports play a major role in the success and competitiveness of various agribusiness firms in the United States. For example, food imports generate income, employment, output, and taxes and provide consumers with lower-priced products than those produced or purchased in the domestic markets. Food imports also provide consumers with a larger variety of products that normally would not be available to them, or that would be available in limited quantities and at higher than normal prices. Consequently, without food imports many U.S. food processing and manufacturing firms would be forced to reduce plant capacity, re-locate food processing and manufacturing facilities, or close plants altogether (Rosson 2000). Thus it is important that food imports that do not comply with U.S. standards be targeted, detected, and intercepted, thereby preventing the entry of those potential threats before they have the chance to do any harm to the U.S. food system and its infrastructure.

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Objective and Data Sources

This paper examines food import refusals by the Food and Drug Administration. We analyze food imports by country, industry, and reasons for the denial of access to the United States economy. The data are from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA 2006–2007).

The data source contains information on the reasons food products were not allowed to enter the United States by industry and by country. The information for this analysis is presented on a monthly basis by country and industry during the period September 2006 to October 2007. The reasons for denial of imports to the United States are limited to the period September 2006–December 2006 due to the large number of imported products that are refused entry to this country. The Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (“the Act”) authorizes the Food and Drug Administration to detain any regulated product that appears to be out of compliance with the Act.

Discussion of Results

Table 1 shows by month the countries that had the most import food refusals to the United States. Results show that India, China, and Mexico were the leading violators of the imports regulated by Food and Drug Administration. India had an average of 164 shipments that were denied entry to the United States. China had an average of 163 shipments and Mexico had an average of 136 shipments. These results suggest that these countries repeatedly violated the Act. Although the data obtained by the authors do not show the monetary value of shipments denied entrance, but we believe that the delays likely incur substantial time, effort, and money to get these items cleared to enter the United States, and they still may be not allowed to enter the country even so. Therefore, these countries need to take the time, effort, and money to make sure the products that leave their borders meet the requirements to enter this country. It is usually less costly

Table 1. Top Ten Import Refusals by Country, September 2006–October 2007.

Country	6-Sep	6-Oct	6-Nov	6-Dec	7-Jan	7-Feb	7-Mar	7-Apr
Canada	71	46	29	35	29	46	0	0
China	163	146	113	165	194	144	171	257
Dominican Republic	92	66	39	75	0	0	25	68
France	57	75	41	41	63	35	24	51
Germany	53	0	0	39	28	0	0	0
India	186	143	107	213	182	129	237	122
Indonesia	57	46	51	0	0	44	26	0
Mexico	127	114	189	80	141	77	151	140
United Kingdom	266	44	0	0	0	71	87	0
United States	81	39	0	0	58	35	41	0
Republic Of China	0	38	0	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	0	0	54	0	0	0	0	0
Pakistan	0	0	54	0	0	0	0	0
South Korea	0	0	47	0	0	0	0	36
Vietnam	0	0	0	35	0	0	56	50
Philippines	0	0	0	0	32	0	0	0
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nigeria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Italy	0	0	0	0	35	38	40	53
Hong Kong	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Japan	0	0	0	0	78	40	0	43

to do the required tasks before the products leave the shipping countries borders than to do the tasks after the products have been denied entrance to the United States.

Table 2 provides a list of the industry codes. Table 3 shows that the industries that had the largest number of shipments refused entry into the United States were 16-Fishery/Seafood Products; 24-Vegetables/Vegetable Products; and 28-Spices, Flavors, and Salts. For example, the Fishery/Seafood Products industry—the top violator—had an average of 147 shipments that were delayed for entry into the United States.

The top ten reasons for food products to be denied entrance to the United States during September–December 2006 are shown in Table 4. The main reason most shipments were denied entry to the United States was that the products were filthy.

The number of shipments denied for this reason totaled 463. The second leading reason was no process, totaling 413. This means that the manufacturer had not filed information on its scheduled process as required by 21 CFR 108.25(c) (2) or 108.35(c) (2), according to the list of violations described by the Food and Drug Administration.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper examines food import refusals by the Food and Drug Administration. We analyze food imports by country, industry, and reason for the denial of access to the United States economy. The data are from the Food and Drug Administration. This data source contains information on the reasons food products were not allowed to enter the United States by industry and by country.

Table 1. Top Ten Import Refusals by Country, September 2006–October 2007 (Continued).

Country	7-May	7-Jun	7-Jul	7-Aug	7-Sep	7-Oct	Means
Canada	49	40	59	52	46	39	38.6428571
China	165	146	130	187	110	188	162.785714
Dominican Republic	216	97	0	0	0	0	48.4285714
France	0	0	0	35	53	34	36.3571429
Germany	0	0	35	0	0	0	11.0714286
India	153	141	122	173	176	216	164.285714
Indonesia	0	0	46	42	0	57	26.3571429
Mexico	162	139	164	160	96	165	136.071429
United Kingdom	0	39	69	0	43	38	46.9285714
United States		44	37	139	43	122	49.1538462
Republic Of China	0	0	0	0	0	55	6.64285714
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.85714286
Pakistan	0	0	57	50	0	0	11.5
South Korea	44	0	0	0	33	0	11.4285714
Vietnam	54	35	0	0	0	0	16.4285714
Philippines	0	0	0	0	42	0	5.28571429
Thailand	0	0	0	34	0	0	2.42857143
Nigeria	0	0	0	36	0	0	2.57142857
Italy	55	44	66	0	0	0	23.6428571
Hong Kong	0	0	0	0	31	40	5.07142857
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	0	35	2.5
Japan	0	38	0	0	0	0	14.2142857

The results of this study provided data and information to exporters, importers, government officials, and others on the reasons certain products are not allowed to enter the United States by the FDA. This information in turn should make those entities much more aware of the reasons that their products do not comply with U.S. standards and what they can do to make their products acceptable for the U.S. market. The analysis found that the Fishery/Seafood Products and the Vegetables/Vegetable Products industries were the largest violators of the FDA Act. The most common violator countries of the Food and Drug Administration regulations were India, China, and Mexico. The main reasons that commodities were denied entry to the United States during the period September–December 2006 were that products were filthy, had no process, and contained pesticides.

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Table 2. List of Industry Refusal Codes (Continued).

31-Coffee/Tea
32-Alcoholic Beverage
33-Candy W/O Choc/Special/Chew Gum
34-Choc/Cocoa Prod
35-Gelatin/Remmet/Pudding Mix/Pie Filling
36-Food Sweeteners (Nutritive)
37-Multi Food Dinner/Grav/Sauce/Special
38-Soup
39-Prep Salad Prod
40-Baby Food Prod
41-Dietary Conv Food/Meal Replacements
45-Food Additives (Human Use)

Table 3. Top Ten Industry Food Import Refusals, September 2006–October 2007 (Continued).

Industry Codes	7-May	7-Jun	7-Jul	7-Aug	7-Sep	7-Oct	Means
16	179	124	157	132	123	213	147.1429
24	255	177	91	69	66	100	109.3571
3	48	31	24	29	46	19	38.35714
33	93	40	41	45	38	46	41.28571
28	79	47	53	63	29	54	50.57143
34	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.214286
29	0	0	0	0	18	40	18.28571
7	0	0	0	0	0	33	13.5
21	57	55	58	42	48	53	42.28571
25	29	44	20	35	0	0	26.57143
22	58	24	0	0	0	0	13.85714
12	0	29	21	0	0	26	6.5
27	0	34	0	48	33	0	17.64286
37	31	0	28	0	0	28	12.28571
23	0	0	0	16	21	0	5.142857
20	36	0	0	0	0	0	4
9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.428571
30	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
31	0	0	21	0	0	0	1.5
2	0	0	0	34	14	0	3.428571

Table 4. Top Ten Reasons for Food Import Refusals, September–December 2006.

Reasons	Number of Shipments
Filthy	463
No Process	413
Pesticide	350
Salmonella	336
Needs FCE	286
Unsafe Color	230
Nutrition Labeling	225
List Ingredients	199
No English	140
Lacks N/C	124